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AUTHOR Nisbet, Janice A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The development and implementation of a counseling model designed to improve retention and academic success of high risk students at Ball State University, Indiana, are described. Initially, academic advisors were trained through workshops conducted by team members to translate information on individual advisee learning styles, behavior preferences, locus of control, and anxiety (particularly on tests) into advising strategies. Information was generated through a combination of: Scholastic Aptitude Test or American College Test scores, the Myers-Briggs Type Scholastic Aptitude Test or American College Test scores, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Effective Study Skills Test, the Suinn Anxiety Test, and the Rotter-Internal/External Locus of Control. Testing, test interpretation to individual students, and educational prescriptions for remedial courses and behavior change strategies were accomplished, and a statistical design was created. Strategies that were transmitted to advisors included: remedial/developmental classes, study skills workshops, and individual and group advising sessions for career guidance and decision-making. Methods of interpreting the data in terms of advising impact were designed through: advisor training workshops, planning workshops for students, planning remedial and developmental strategies, and planning appropriate support services. The keys to success of this approach to advising include: the quality of information continuously flowing among advisors and team members, the provision for training of advisors, the mutual professional respect sustained by the cooperative efforts, and the knowledge that the cooperative effort can promote in faculty and curriculum development. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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ADVISING WITH 20/20 VISION: IMPROVING STUDENT RETENTION BY USING LEARNING STYLES INFORMATION IN ACADEMIC ADVISING

By: Janice A. Nisbet, Virgil E. Ruble, K. Terry Schurr
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

A continuing frustration of academic advisors for special student populations is one that arises from academic failure and attrition stemming not so much from academic ability, but from a collision of unperceived or hidden learning style, anxiety, and control-orientation problems experienced by these students. Although advisors have individual student folders filled with traditional bits of information about national test scores, class ranks, high school and transfer course grades, testimonials from counselors, and indications of academic career interest, still the vision of the advisor is blurred as to the causes for the successes and failures these bits and peices relate. In spite of the most conscientious advising efforts, the students continue to fail and to drop or stop out.

Advisors repeatedly expressed a desire for information that would clue them to such insights as:

a) which students will respond best to group advising and which will prefer individual advising
b) degree of external/internal control possessed by students with interests in areas where responses to external authority or to self-determination were keys to success
c) students' perceptions of needs for organized, highly structured learning, or for flexible, highly self-paced instruction
d) individual learning style behaviors that affect test-taking, study habits, and time management

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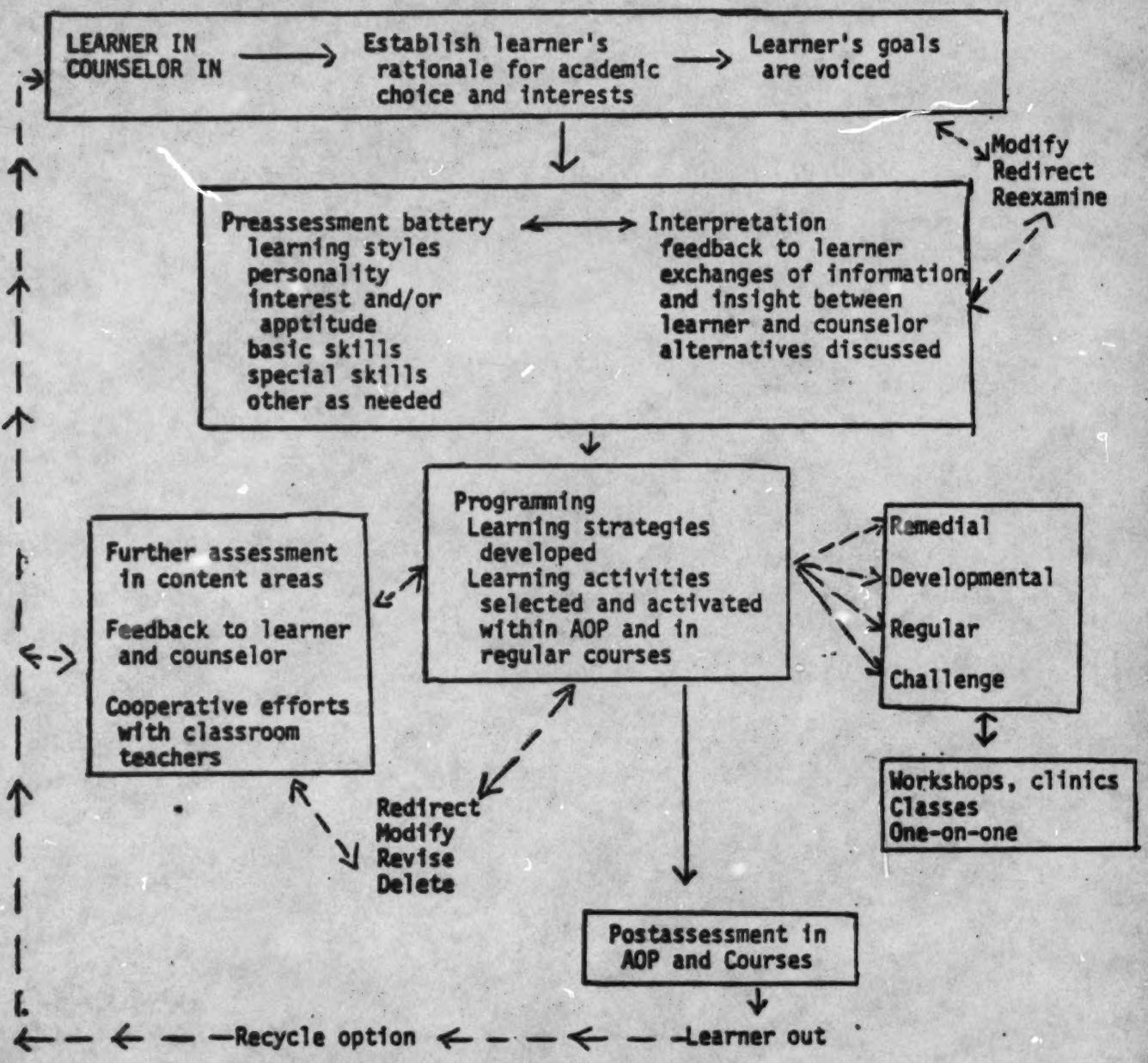
These types of concerns being expressed by the advisors have no causitive bases in intelligence; yet, the manifestations of the behaviors expressed therein can have definite affects on the academic success achieved by these students. Our task, then, became one of discovering how the necessary information to provide insights productive in advising could be provided and what strategies could be formulated to maximize the effectiveness of these insights.

Within the context of the Academic Opportunity Program which serves high risk students at Ball State, a team, composed of the program director, a psychometrist, and a statistician, had demonstrated through research that the understanding of student learning styles, behavior preferences, loci of control, and anxiety thresholds enhanced a teacher's ability to project classroom learning strategies which served to maximized academic achievement. That these same kinds of information could generate insights for academic advisors seemed a logical assumption.

The next step taken by the team was to translate the assumption into action. The Director of the Academic Opportunity Program, the University's Head Psychometrist, and the Associate Director of Academic Computing brought again together their expertise; and formulated a model for action which included a testing and, statistical design, as well, as a system for transmitting recommendations for placement in remedial and developmental classes. In addition the model allowed for suggesting such things as the time frame for these remedial sequences, appropriate study skills workshops necessary to improve student study habits and time management, and for recommending special advising strategies appropriate to the students individually. Workshops for the advisors were conducted to acquaint them with the instrumentation being used and the appropriate ways in which the information generated could be used by them; workshops were available, also, to acquaint advisors with strategy--generating. In the model,

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS
ACADEMIC COUNSELING MODEL



J.A. Nisbet, Ball State University, 1974. Revised, 1977. Revised 1980.

advisors received information, educational prescriptions, and strategy suggestions, but the choice of how these insights were translated into action was their's.

Initially, the academic advisors were trained through workshops conducted by team members to translate the information on individual advisee learning styles, behavior preferences, locus of control, and anxiety (particularly on tests) into advising strategies. Information was generated through a combination of:

SAT or ACT Scores

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The Effective Study Skills Test

The Suinn Anxiety Test

The Rotter-Internal/External Locus of Control

The testing, interpretation of tests to individual students, and the writing of educational prescriptions for remedial courses and behavior-change strategies was accomplished by the personnel in the Psychometric Unit and the Academic Opportunity Program and its subunit the Learning Evaluation Access Project. Statistical design was created by the staff of the Academic Computing Unit. The information, in a form compatible for use, by advisors was forwarded to them. Strategies developed included remedial/developmental classes, study skills workshops, individual and group advising sessions for career guidance and decision making, and recommendations for further testing. Also, formats for a variety of advising strategies were developed in workshops with advisors based on learning style preferences.

Methods of interpreting the data in terms of advising impact were designed through, 1) advisor training workshops, 2) planning workshops for students, 3) planning remedial and developmental strategies, and 4) planning appropriate

support services. The team worked with the high risk student advisors to perfect advising strategies in terms of format, content, delivery, and to build their expertise in information gathering, to train advisors in the use of the information in the context of their mission, to evolve strategies for use in translating advising insights into positive student action, and to create an overall research design appropriate to the long-term continuation of the project.

Now, six years and 3,000 high risk students later, the data supports that by using information on individual student learning-styles, study behaviors, locus of control, and anxiety level retention has improved from 75% to 91% for the first year, and from 48% to 91% for the baccalaureate experience. Student attitude and awareness of advising benefits has been enhanced as measured by an increase in voluntary visits for advising beyond those required. Advisor satisfaction with the quality of advising information, and with the student response to advising has been heightened as reflected in the creativity being displayed in advising strategies, in the increased dedication and career satisfaction being expressed by the AOP advising staff.

The keys to the success of this approach to advising with 20/20 vision are:

1) the quality of information flowing continuously among advisors and team members
2) the provision for training of advisors in the correct use of the information through activities which build confidence and lower frustration and anxiety levels
3) the mutual professional respect sustained by this cooperative effort which promotes professional growth in everyone involved in the effort
4) the knowledge, gained by practical experience, that

the combined efforts of the advisors and the support team can promote creative curriculum change, create skills workshops for staff and students as needed with University-wide support

5) result in a holistic approach to advising high risk students

Through the mutually productive efforts of advisors and the team members, the techniques for acquiring insight-producing data have been perfected; methods of interpreting the data in terms of advising impact have been refined; and advising strategies capitalizing on this input have developed to enhance the retention and academic success of the high risk student population.

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